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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

THE LATER YEATS

Yeats in his later work, all things considered, is really the most characteristic poet of modern Europe. He has, more than any other continental writer, that virile pessimism which has haunted Europe for the last quarter of a century; he celebrates, subtly and strangely, that aristocratic idea which in our day has again become paramount in Europe, and his work has in full measure the pride and anger which are the only two of the seven deadly sins which produce great literature. Great literature, like great wars, always derives from somebody's pride or somebody's anger.

The later Yeats may be said to begin with the publication by the Cuala Press, in 1910, of *The Green Helmet and Other Poems*, and continues with further developments in the volume *Responsibilities* published last year. This later work differs from his early work in vocabulary, and in an impassioned directness of expression acquired through years of working for the theatre. It is an attempt to get nearer the ordinary things of life, an attempt to grapple with common and topical interests—city councils, political intrigues, music hall dancers, etc. The nearer he gets to these things the more tragic and personal does he become, so that the joyousness, as of a man out on a great adventure, which characterized the work of his youth, is all gone, but in its stead there is the virility of one "who has come unto his strength."

When we compare *The Dream of a Blessed Spirit*, espe-

The Later Yeats

cially what William Archer called the white heat of inspiration of its last stanza—

With white feet of angels seven
Her white feet go glimmering,
And above the deep of heaven,
Flame on flame and wing on wing;

and the melancholy splendor of the following poem out of *Responsibilities*, we see the difference between poetry about a dream, and poetry about a living reality to which the whole experience of the life of a man has gone in the making:

Suddenly I saw the cold and rock-delighting Heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice;
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild, that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of season
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to quicken,
Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and stricken
With the injustice of the skies for punishment?

In his early work he brought back again the old Irish legends and folk-tales; in his later work he has brought back that imaginative and impassioned satire which used to be the birth-gift of the old Gaelic bards. Synge, who put the woman who hated *The Playboy* in a poem and cursed her, so to speak, with candle, book and bell, is less frightening than Yeats, who with such simple and homely words satirizes treacherous friends, bad poets, and ignorant despisers of art.

The first of the volumes mentioned contains *The Green Helmet*, which is the most characteristic of all Irish plays.

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This play, which is an heroic satire, is, I believe, Mr. Yeats' greatest dramatic work. It is remarkable as the first play in English written in ballad metre. It satirizes Irish quarrelsomeness, but it also pays a tribute to the heroic element which is always in Irish life. *Mary M. Colum*

THE DEATH OF STEPHEN PHILLIPS

Two poets have died during the past month, and one actress dear to lovers of great poetry. Stuart Merrill, the American who gave up his native land and language to sit at the feet of Mallarmé and become a French symbolist poet of high distinction. Ada Rehan, whose *Rosalind* and *Katharine* will never be forgotten by anyone who saw her beauty enrich these rôles, and heard her voice drip golden honey over the magic cadences of the lines. And Stephen Phillips.

Fifteen years ago there would have been a veritable clangor of bells to usher out this poet. What were people thinking of him then? "In this case genius is no illusion . . . the footfall of the immortals," said *Blackwood's*. "One who redeems our age from its comparative barrenness in the higher realms of poetry," said W. L. Courtney. "He has achieved the impossible," said William Archer. And Churton Collins said of *Paolo and Francesca* in the *Saturday Review*, "It claims his kinship with the aristocrats of his art—with Sophocles and with Dante."

Such overpraise was an injustice against a poet of rich fancy, with a delicate feeling for tonal cadences. It is hardly too much to say that it ruined him, for it urged him toward